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Cleaveland, Agnes Morley

American primer

[Berkeley, Calif.]

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**AMERICAN  
PRIMER**

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AMERICAN PRIMER

*by*

AGNES MORLEY CLEVELAND

gint 4  
President N.M. Buller  
3-17-37

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## FOREWORD

The libraries of the world are overflowing with books on the subject of government. But in this, as in every other subject, there are a few basic ideas upon which all the vast superstructure is built.

A form of government is man's own answer to the question: What is the goal of human effort? Is it the good of the individual or is the individual important only as he contributes to the good of the "state"?

Christianity declares that the good of the individual is the object of all human endeavor. For that reason Christianity is under fire wherever the collectivist theory of human relationships obtains.

America is a Christian nation. To establish a society where *individual* liberties should be forever secure was the dominant motive of its founders. Only recently has that purpose been challenged in this country and the collectivist doctrine preached as a higher concept of human welfare.

It is the hope of the author that this simple presentation of the underlying concepts upon which our American pattern of life has heretofore rested may be an aid to the clear thinking upon this subject which is imperative.

A. M. C.

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AGNES MORLEY CLEVELAND

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## AMERICAN PRIMER

BY

AGNES MORLEY CLEVELAND

- Q. What is America?  
A. America is an ideal of human liberty. Whoever understands and accepts this ideal is a potential American. We comprise many racial stocks bound together by one ideal.
- Q. What is this ideal?  
A. Equality of opportunity.
- Q. What sort of opportunity?  
A. The opportunity to strive for the legitimate attainment of what one values supremely.
- Q. Does America provide this opportunity?  
A. Yes. Our basic law establishes it. Dishonest and selfish men often attempt to interfere with the working of the law, but that is a violation of our theory of government and not a result of it.
- Q. What is government?  
A. Government is a scheme whereby human beings may get along together in peace.
- Q. What distinguishes the human being from the rest of the animal kingdom?  
A. He is the highest animal in the biological realm *plus something more*; something men call a soul; something

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that gives him the *right to an opinion* and the right to protection in expressing that opinion. In this way man, through the exercise of imagination, modifies his environment in his own interest rather than wait for the slow process of evolution to adapt him to it.

Q. Do slaves enjoy this right?

A. No. That is why slavery is the greatest evil in the world.

Q. Is slavery a greater evil than war?

A. Yes, because slavery can, and ultimately does, produce all the physical horrors of war, and in addition is longer drawn out and more hopeless and spiritually debasing.

Q. Why is war often called the greatest evil?

A. Because war is more dramatic and attention is more easily focused upon it than upon slavery.

Q. What is war?

A. A method of settling an argument.

Q. Is there such a thing as a righteous war?

A. Yes, if the argument is in behalf of a righteous cause and the opponent will listen to no other argument. The use of violence to settle an argument is a blot upon civilization, but there are "horrors of peace" whose removal will automatically do away with war.

Q. What can stop war?

A. A common ideal. The American Consti-

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tution is the ideal which has stopped war between the various states in this country.

Q. What about the Civil War in 1860?

A. The issue there was the Constitution itself. It was America's second test of the principle of human rights as paramount to all other issues.

Q. What is a Constitution?

A. A Constitution is a covenant which people enter into between themselves to respect one another's rights.

Q. What rights?

A. Rights which belong to human beings because they are something beyond animals: the right of honest religious practice; the right of free speech and free assemblage; the right to bear arms on lawful occasions; the right to legal redress; etc., etc.

Q. Where do these conditions appear in the American Constitution?

A. They are implied throughout the entire instrument but are categorically listed in the first ten Amendments known as the "American Bill of Rights." These Amendments were demanded before all of the original 13 colonies would ratify the Constitution.

Q. Why is it called "American Bill of Rights?"

A. Because the original Bill of Rights was promulgated in England in 1689, about four centuries after the Magna Charta,

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which was the first and greatest political declaration in which human rights were conceded. The Magna Charta was secured by the common people to prevent the tyranny of their rulers. It established the principle that there is such a thing as *inalienable rights* in human relationships, rights which are not man given and which, therefore, cannot be taken away by man.

- Q. Do inalienable rights conflict with property rights?
- A. They are inseparable. It is only when property is acquired by violating the law that we call it supplanting "human rights" with "property rights." Men living together peaceably must recognize the sanctity of property rights as well as other rights.
- Q. What is "the state"?
- A. A voluntary organization of individual human beings who unite for mutual protection and benefit.
- Q. Does such cooperative effort abrogate any basic human rights?
- A. No. The individual's welfare is the goal of the state. It could have no other reason for existing.
- Q. When there is a conflict of individual interests must there not be a super-authority to decide between them?
- A. There can be no conflict of basic interests under a constitutional form of government. The one all-inclusive interest

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in such a form of government is that one's status as a human being shall be recognized and respected. If the conflict is between human desires for material advantages, some sort of give-and-take compromise must be worked out.

- Q. Has America such a give-and-take system?
- A. Yes. It is called "the checks and balances" theory of government.
- Q. What is meant by that?
- A. Fundamentally, it means that human impulses, human enthusiasms, human whims, must be checked and balanced against one another until time shall permit the emergence of that which is socially adaptable and which expresses the average understanding of all the people. Our system releases human energy for constructive ends and checks it against destructive ones.
- Q. How is that accomplished in America?
- A. By checking majority tyranny as well as the possible tyranny of an autocrat, a bureaucracy or any other minority group.
- Q. How is the majority checked?
- A. By the calendar. At stated intervals the majority must submit to a recount of the votes of the whole people in order to redetermine the majority will. At each recount (election) there is a realignment of individuals. A different set of people may come into temporary power.



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- Q. Is the "calendar limit" the safest of all checks upon possible mob-hysteria?
- A. Yes, because it is absolutely impersonal. It is not the will of man, but the impersonal working of time itself.
- Q. Does this make government less responsive to the will of the people?
- A. No, it makes it impartially responsive to the will of the whole people and not to any group within the whole, whether a minority or a majority group.
- Q. Are there any other checks upon possibly misguided human passion in the American scheme of life?
- A. Yes. The separation of governmental functions into administrative, legislative, and judicial. Also the division of political authority into federal, state, and municipal.
- Q. Are these devices all for the same purpose?
- A. Yes. They are to insure the individual against usurpation of any of his inalienable rights; to secure orderly progress and to give all of the people a voice in their own government.
- Q. Does any other nation have these safeguards?
- A. Not to the extent we enjoy. Even democratic England is more at the mercy of temporary outbursts of majority enthusiasm which may ultimately prove to be what the people did not want after all. In England a majority expression

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- of disapproval can throw an existing government out of office without waiting for a predetermined lapse of time. This makes for majority domination rather than for the impartial effort to secure what all the people really want.
- Q. What do all the people really want?
- A. They really want progress. Only the blindly egotistical are sure they know what form progress should take. The blindly egotistical, entrenched in authority, would impede progress.
- Q. Can progress be actually stopped?
- A. No, but it can be hampered so that it goes forward only by violence. The aim of democracy is to provide a method whereby progress may go forward without violence. This is accomplished through the votes of the people.
- Q. Has America enjoyed steady and orderly progress?
- A. Yes. From the arrival of the Pilgrims in 1620 until the present day, America has shown along all lines the most rapid progress that the world has ever witnessed, as well as having had the most enduring peace.
- Q. Along what lines must a nation show progress in order to justify itself?
- A. Political, Social, Economic, and Spiritual.
- Q. How has America justified herself politically?
- A. America is the world's model for a suc-

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cessful League of Nations, Forty-eight political units, held together by a common ideal of human rights, and cemented by the mutual acceptance of the Constitution, have demonstrated that it is possible for communities of different interests, different racial origins, and different training to live in harmony without artificial barriers, either military or economic, being raised against one another.

- Q. How has America justified herself on the social side?
- A. America is free from the greatest blight that can crush the spirit of a people—class distinction on the basis of birth.
- Q. Have we no class distinction in America?
- A. Nobody in America is compelled either by law or by tradition to remain in any particular so-called class. Of course, we have temporary groupings, such as the employed and the unemployed, the sick and the well, but the individuals who temporarily compose these groups are not fixtures in them and they are always free to get out through their own efforts.
- Q. Has America justified herself on the economic side?
- A. Yes. We have the highest average standard of living of any nation on earth and the widest diffusion of na-

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tional wealth. Although we comprise but 7% of the world's population, we do about one-half of the world's business. Our national income is allocated approximately as follows: Over two-thirds to salaries and wages and the rest to business, large and small. So-called "Big Business" clears less than 4% net profit from 10% of the National Income. If profits from all large and small businesses were thrown into the total income and it was reallocated equally to all the people, the average raise to the wage earners would be very slight. This proves that, notwithstanding all manifest inequalities in distribution, it is not the very rich who hold the national wealth in their own hands and away from the masses. To redistribute the total wealth with any degree of equality would be to levy upon the higher wage earners for the benefit of the lower wage earners. The relative amount contributed by the so-called very wealthy would raise the total average almost imperceptibly.

- Q. What are the social benefits from private profit?
- A. Great foundations for scientific research and social betterment, libraries, privately endowed hospitals, schools, churches, welfare associations of all sorts are supported by private capital. If all wealth were redistributed, the

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support of these institutions would have to come out of direct taxation of all the people and many of them would be abandoned. All would be subject to political exploitation to their great detriment. The money which flows through the hands of capitalists goes back largely into general circulation for public use and benefit.

Q. What can America claim on the spiritual side?

A. Aside from the fact that recognition of man's spiritual status is the cornerstone of our national life, there is a public sentiment in this country which has always been concerned with human welfare. Since 1910 America has had a falling death rate in spite of the millions of unemployed. There have been few, if any, deaths from actual starvation. We have as a nation taken care of our unfortunates. The American conscience is today concerned above all else with the problem of what constitutes social justice.

Q. What is social justice?

A. America recognizes three things as underlying true social justice: (1) Universal franchise; (2) Elementary education at the expense of all the people; (3) Equality of protection by the forces of law and order. When men have these three boons they are equipped to decide upon their own manner of life

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as free men enjoying the blessings of democracy. Liberty of thought coupled with obedience to the will of a *temporary* majority is the basis for social justice.

Q. What is the aim of democracy?

A. The building of national character to the end that increasingly fewer arbitrary laws may be necessary. Neither efficiency nor any immediate interpretation of what constitutes social justice is the supreme aim of democracy. Rather is it character building for the individual citizen.

Q. Is there a distinction between a democracy and a republic?

A. Technically yes, but not in the broader sense in which the word democracy has come to be used. A Republic is a form of delegated authority vested in representatives elected by the people. Strictly speaking, America is a Republic, because it is not the uninformed, undirected "will of the people" which operates. A Republic seeks to keep an "open road for guidance" so that the will of the people may more nearly approximate Ultimate Wisdom. All mass movements of pressure upon these elected representatives violate the basic principle of a republican form of government and tend toward mob-rule and curtailment of individual liberty.

Q. Is not equality as important as liberty?

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- A. Equality cannot be specifically defined. There is no such thing in the realm of the physical universe. In the mental realm as well, there is no literal equality. No two people have identical tastes, desires, hopes, aspirations, or motives. Equality of happiness and satisfaction can never be achieved by arbitrary forcible distribution of material things. Equality of *opportunity* is based upon liberty to seek one's own idea of satisfaction. The effort to substitute an enforced *equality of things* for basic liberty is the effort to substitute privileges for rights, with the result that neither is obtained, and a lower average standard of living is brought about.
- Q. What are the arguments being used today for abandoning the American theory of government?
- A. There are five principal arguments:
1. That we have no more geographical frontier.
  2. That the machine age has completely changed the nature of our society.
  3. That "individualism" belongs to a simple type of society and collectivism to a complex one.
  4. That *laissez faire* has been the basis of American business and has been its undoing.
  5. That the "profit-motive" is socially unethical and should be replaced by the "service-motive."

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- Q. What is the answer to the "no more frontier" argument?
- A. The answer is that we reached our last geographical frontier when the Lewis and Clark expedition arrived in Oregon in the year 1805. Since then it has been intensive development. We have hardly scratched the surface of intensive development in this country. Furthermore, the frontier of new mechanical inventions and new industrial processes offers as wide opportunities for individual enterprise as ever did a geographical wilderness.
- Q. What is the answer to "the machine age" as a reason for abandoning the theory of human relationships which we call our form of government?
- A. The answer is that the machine is man's own creation and subject to his will. It is not a Frankenstein monster which has wrested dominion from man and made of him a helpless victim. The inanimate cannot dictate terms to the animate. There is no logic whatever in the argument that "the state" becomes a super-entity and individuals mere "units of social efficiency" because man has invented machines to relieve himself of drudgery. The machine merely increases man's physical powers but does not affect the principles of his relationship to other men. Moreover, through the use of machines, employment has increased

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at a faster rate than the increase of population. Every new invention opens opportunities for human effort and human enjoyment.

- Q. But does man not have to make social adjustments because of this multiplied mechanical power?
- A. Yes. But since mentality resides in the man and not in the machine, man always has made all adjustments necessary. When he has a basic principle to guide him, his adjustments are socially equitable.
- Q. What is the answer to the argument that "individualism" belongs only to a young or primitive nation and is unsuited to an older and more developed one?
- A. The answer is that thinking is a strictly individual enterprise. There is no such thing as *mass thinking*. Ideas originate with one person's mental effort and are passed on to others. When large numbers accept an idea we call it the "public mind." The origin of the idea may be obscure, but it had a definite source in some *one* human being's mental processes and became common property by acceptance. Therefore, individualism is the source for ideas. A hypothetical entity, called "the group," or "the state," can not think.
- Q. What does "the state," when used in this sense, mean?

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- A. It means a few extreme individualists who presume to do all the thinking for the masses. Actually it means imposing their own will.
- Q. Why has the word "rugged individualism" become a term of opprobrium?
- A. Because the word "rugged" can be misused to suggest "ruthless." It would be difficult to create distaste for the word "individualism" unless some distasteful qualifying adjective were added. Hence those who wish to tear down the American theory of controlled individual liberty, seized upon the word "rugged" and distorted it into meaning "ruthless." *American individualism* is rugged, in the correct use of the word, because it is independent, staunch, and self-respecting. Defamation of terms is just as immoral and frequently more disastrous than defamation of personal character.
- Q. What is the answer to the argument that "*laissez faire*" has brought economic ruin to this country?
- A. In the first place this country is not economically ruined, and in the second place we have never been afflicted with *laissez faire*. The phrase is a French one meaning, in substance, "leaving it alone." American business is and always has been highly regulated. From tariffs through the whole gamut of rate fixing commissions, banking laws,

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workmen's compensation, income tax, etc., etc., the *laissez faire* principle is discarded and has been almost from our beginnings as a nation.

Q. Why is the "profit-motive" called wicked?

A. For the same reason that other phrases are used to obscure the true purposes of those who misuse the term to undermine confidence in American institutions. No two people define "profit" alike. There is every kind of profit; mental, moral and spiritual, as well as financial, and there is no clearly defined line between them. Every act of our lives—if we are free men and not slaves—is performed with the idea of its being profitable in one form or another.

Q. Is the "profit-motive" synonymous with capitalism?

A. Yes.

Q. What is capitalism?

A. Capitalism is the science of the use of capital.

Q. What is capital?

A. Capital is the product resulting from the exercise of four spiritual qualities: initiative, industry, honesty, and self-restraint. In other words, a person thinks of something and decides to do it; that is initiative. He does it; that is industry. He does it properly; that is honesty. He does not consume all that he has produced; that is self-restraint.

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Q. To whom does this product belong?

A. Morally, it belongs to the person who exercised these spiritual qualities.

Q. What are the incentives for creating capital?

A. Necessity and hope of exceptional reward.

Q. Which has operated in this country?

A. Both.

Q. Would these incentives exist in a society under a dictatorship?

A. The necessity motive would produce a minimum result. Under a dictatorship, false hopes must be held out to take the place of realizable hopes. An artificial enthusiasm for the thing called "the state" must be induced by skillful propaganda. Dictators take the capital away from those who have created it, on the false promise of producing a better society *in the future*.

Q. Who are the masters under a dictatorship?

A. The small group surrounding the dictator.

Q. What is the principal argument made by a would-be dictator in order to get himself elevated to power?

A. That wealth is unjustly concentrated in the hands of the few and that he, the dictator, will redistribute it.

Q. Does this deceive people?

A. It appeals to unfortunate or bitter people who *feel* but do not *think*.

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- Q. If they thought, what would they realize?
- A. They would realize that dictatorial political power concentrated in the hands of a few operates against any creation of wealth because it deadens initiative.
- Q. Is wealth dangerously concentrated in the hands of a few in America?
- A. Wealth, meaning capital, must be, in large measure, under control of the competent and the experienced, or there can be no production. But the *management* of capital is only one aspect of it. The *benefits* of capital is the other aspect. In America the benefits are more widely diffused than in any nation on earth.
- Q. Is it as justly distributed as it should be?
- A. No. But it is more justly distributed than at any time in the past history of mankind. It is a further tribute to our national conscience that we compare our condition with an ideal state rather than with the conditions out of which mankind has grown. The galley slaves, or the workmen who built the pyramids, would undoubtedly consider the status of even an unemployed American worker one of bliss.
- Q. What is there to lend hope that the condition of the workers in America will continue to improve?

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- A. The general trend of economic thought and practice in America and the psychology of the American business man assures it. In what is called the "old" economics, labor was considered wholly a part of production cost, and therefore to be kept at the lowest possible point. But gradually there grew up in America the understanding that wages is buying power, hence a great home market which had been neglected in the scramble for foreign markets. Therefore far-sighted employers began to raise wages and cut production costs by skillful management and mass output. Henry Ford led in this new theory of wages as a market to be stimulated.
- Q. What are the psychological factors characteristic of American business men?
- A. American business men, as a class, are primarily interested in expanding their businesses. They care little about putting capital into non-productive personal things such as vast quantities of jewels, etc., as do East Indian potentates. American business men put the larger part of their surplus back into industrial enterprises which furnish jobs and produce benefits for large numbers of people. Furthermore, great family fortunes are comparatively few in America. The American expression

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is, "From shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations."

- Q. Are there no great family fortunes in America, controlled by a few men?
- A. Yes, but until all the facts can be ascertained, it is impossible to say how socially detrimental these are. For example: If Henry Ford were to exercise his legal right and close down all of his enterprises over night, it would be a social catastrophe of the first magnitude. The same is true of most of the large public corporations and industries.
- Q. Who owns most of the large industries in America?
- A. Millions of American citizens. Stockholders outnumber wage earners by a considerable margin.
- Q. What does this indicate?
- A. It indicates that "every man a capitalist" is the American trend.
- Q. Is this trend toward general prosperity and a steadily rising standard of living likely to continue?
- A. Yes, unless arbitrarily interfered with by politicians.
- Q. Why do politicians interfere?
- A. Because they want power, and to secure power, they must have the votes of people who think the politicians can give them privileges. Hence they appeal to the poor.

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- Q. Are there more so-called poor than so-called rich?
- A. Yes. Because most people prefer to be told what to do rather than to take the responsibility and risk of carrying the burden of decisions. To become rich honestly, one must exercise not only the qualities of initiative, industry, honesty, and self-restraint, but one must also assume risks which are often extremely burdensome. The rich by inheritance are a small and unstable minority. The "profit system" is really the profit and loss system. More newly launched businesses fail than succeed.
- Q. Are most business men honest?
- A. Yes. If they were not, they could not long endure. Dishonesty winds itself up very quickly.
- Q. Is business, in general, as honest as it should be?
- A. No. Probably nobody is as honest as he should be, but business as a whole is as honest as politics as a whole, and to transfer power from business to politics would be to jump from the frying pan into the fire. There is no such a thing as a fool-proof or knave-proof social system.
- Q. Is the country as safe under business domination as it would be under more extensive political domination?
- A. Yes. Probably safer, because politicians too often get into power by the



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easy route of promises, whereas a business executive arrives at a place of power only through performance. Furthermore, the business man is staking his own money as well as the investor's money on his judgment.

- Q. Do politicians face a profit and loss test?
- A. It is mostly profit and no loss to the politician while he is in office. He has, too often, risked only the promises he has made. But once in power, he may become despotic if unchecked.
- Q. What can break any business depression?
- A. Restored confidence.
- Q. Is that all that is necessary?
- A. Yes. Humanity has every ingredient but that one for permanent prosperity. We have supply, demand, raw material, technical ability, money for financing—everything that goes into the making of prosperity.
- Q. Why do not we (in America) launch it, and prove to the world its immediate feasibility?
- A. Because the obsession for "reform" has settled over us like a pall and nobody knows what kind of reform will be or should be tried.
- Q. Is this desire for reform sincere?
- A. Some of it is, but a great deal of it is a blind for efforts to destroy the American ideal of human liberty and replace

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it with the old autocratic idea. The human lust for power is insatiable. Great concentration of power is possible only under the autocratic theory of government where the rank and file of human beings are treated as unprotesting "social units" without the right to experiment in their own way of life.

- Q. Is not a great deal of reform needed?
- A. Assuredly. But it must begin with the strengthening of individual character. The blanket reforms so unthinkingly proposed neglect that factor. They usually propose to shower benefits upon all alike, upon the undeserving as well as the deserving.
- Q. Are most people suffering privation through no fault of their own?
- A. Nobody can answer that question accurately. Just how much, or how little, anybody is responsible for the condition in which he finds himself Omniscience alone knows. It is decidedly dangerous to build up a popular sentiment that every person in distress is an innocent victim of a vicious system, and that the "world owes him a living."
- Q. Is there a danger of overworking the sentiment, "The system is to blame?"
- A. Great danger. We weaken the whole national fibre when we lay too many social ills at the door of "the system," and absolve the individual from all moral responsibility.

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- Q. What is the remedy?
- A. A reawakened public and private conscience and sense of personal responsibility.
- Q. Are there signs of this taking place?
- A. Yes. People are beginning to think. A depression is always, by its nature, a great stimulus in that respect. Those who offer Communism or Fascism as a solution find it increasingly difficult to make out a case for themselves in view of the examples of how these dictatorships work in practice. Other than dictatorship there is only Constitutionalism. Americans are turning to the study of that with renewed interest.
- Q. Is there no middle ground, Christian Socialism, for instance?
- A. No. Christian Socialism is diluted Communism, having the same ultimate objective—the abolition of private capital and the substitution of control over industry by a small all-powerful clique.
- Q. Why is this dangerous?
- A. Because the management of human beings is vastly more difficult than the management of inanimate matter. If human beings are reduced to "units of social efficiency," which is to say, to animate cogs working alongside the inanimate cogs in the social machine, then uncontested power and authority must be concentrated in the manage-

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- ment of them, even the power of life and death.
- Q. Can there be such a thing as collectivism as demanded by so-called Christian Socialism?
- A. No. Christianity is based upon individual responsibility and individual accountability, hence *individual status* is the social unit.
- Q. How does the doctrine of "my brother's keeper" apply?
- A. It applies in recognizing one's fellow creatures as "sons of God" and according them that status.
- Q. How is this recognition given?
- A. By acknowledging that there are "inalienable rights" and allowing freedom in exercising them.
- Q. Is it in this that men are born "free and equal?"
- A. Yes. We are born *human beings with the capacity to think*. To surrender this right to a dictator or to a so-called "system" is to surrender one's birthright.
- Q. Is America in danger of losing her freedom?
- A. No. America is waking up to the threats against it, which is all that is necessary. People who have once known freedom do not surrender it.
- Q. How should we treat the enemies of our theory of government?
- A. Americans will show such a united front of loyalty to their form of gov-

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ernment that traitors to it will look as foolish as they really are.

- Q. Should the subversive elements be put down with violence?
- A. Not unless they incite violence first. If they do, it is the duty of our forces of law and order to quell them.
- Q. What should be the limits to tolerance?
- A. When facts warrant the conviction that a demand for "tolerance" is not made in good faith, but is a cloak behind which to hide a purpose to destroy our system—a system which is tolerance itself—in favor of an autocratic system which knows no tolerance, then there is no virtue in allowing one's self to be deceived. Tolerance is no virtue where human liberty is at stake.
- Q. When humanity has rid itself of the menace of human dictatorship what may we expect as the next step?
- A. A greatly accelerated prosperity and enhanced social justice. Poverty is unnecessary and will be abolished, but not by any short cut or concentrated power in the hands of a few despots.
- Q. Is abolishing poverty the supreme object of society?
- A. No. That is but one step. After it has been accomplished the most serious problem remains to be faced.
- Q. What is that?
- A. The establishing of man's true relationship to his Creator; in other words,

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the understanding of what is ultimately true and right, which alone can bring satisfaction.

- Q. Will America succeed?
- A. It must, because America was founded upon the motto, "In God We Trust."

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